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# Shared Images

How the Internet Has Transformed the Image Economy

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## How the Internet Has Transformed the Image Economy

André Gunthert

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- 1 In the late 1980s, Bill Gates, cofounder of Microsoft, recognized that the market for images was to become one of the growth sectors of the new digital economy.<sup>1</sup> With the creation of Interactive Home Systems, which changed its name to Corbis in 1995, his gamble brings to mind Paul Valéry's vision of the future from 1928: 'Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign.'<sup>2</sup>
- 2 But Bill Gates was wrong about one thing. He envisioned a company that would market reproductions of items from existing institutional collections. After all, weren't images high-end products, created by professionals, protected by copyright, and delivered through specialized distribution channels to consumers whose use of them was carefully controlled? Since the rise of the Internet's visual platforms,<sup>3</sup> however – chief among them Flickr and YouTube – the liveliest segment of the image economy<sup>4</sup> has been based on self-production, with the dissemination and direct accessing of multimedia content effected by the users themselves. Unforeseeable even a decade ago, this transition from an economy of controlled distribution to a situation of self-managed abundance is altering our relationship with images in fundamental ways.

## The Era of the Amateurs

- 3 Bill Gates was not alone in his failure to anticipate this shift to the distribution of images via the Web. In 2002, following an initial experimental phase,<sup>5</sup> the rapid expansion of the market for digital cameras and camera phones sparked the proliferation of paid hosting services aimed at the general public.<sup>6</sup> These websites allowed users to store as well as view their files online in the form of albums or personalizable web pages. The pairing of these two functions provided an unprecedented level of convenience. At a time when

image management software was not yet widely available, online storage represented an attractive option for users with a broadband connection to the Internet. The convenience of remote access to images was immediately hailed as a significant advantage by professionals and artists who wished to promote their work, as well as by amateurs who could now share their images with family and friends. In the case of video, the use of an online platform to disseminate files was a welcome alternative to the solutions offered by the hosting services, which were generally quite expensive and intended solely for professional use.

- 4 The tools that made these new services possible belong to the era of the dynamic web – since 2004 referred to as ‘Web 2.0’ – which is marked by a simplification of the process of posting content online and a heightened level of interaction with users.<sup>7</sup> Until then, individuals only had access to tools for interpersonal communication, as the cost of distributing images on a larger scale was prohibitive for all but a select few. By making it significantly easier to publish, as well as view content online, Web 2.0 has caused a seismic shift in the media landscape and has threatened the division between private and public space. These shifts were seen as manifestations of a ‘revolution of amateurs’ and the democratization of the production of information, and were championed in 2004 by Dan Gillmor in his book *We the Media*.<sup>8</sup> Together with the legal innovations of ‘free culture’<sup>9</sup> and the theory of the ‘long tail’ economy,<sup>10</sup> they were seen as delineating ‘a coherent picture of a possible future for our society.’<sup>11</sup>
- 5 Created in February 2004 by Stewart Butterfield and Caterina Fake, Flickr is very much a product of this outlook. Like the previous generation of hosting services, there is a paid subscription option, but Flickr also offers free accounts.<sup>12</sup> Instead of placing the emphasis on a personalized presentation of images, it reduces that presentation to a standard formula. It does, however, afford a high degree of interaction with the content through comments, favorites, and tags. Rather than encouraging users to restrict access to their photographs, Flickr fosters a culture of sharing by allowing for the creation of groups and group albums, as well as by promoting open access and the use of Creative Commons licenses.<sup>13</sup> For the first time, the ability to export content to external websites was presented as a highly developed and prominently advertised aspect of functionality. The openness of the application guaranteed an unprecedented level of dialogue with the world of blogs and the dynamic environment, which were burgeoning at the time. The mark of activism borne by Flickr makes it one of the most valuable elements of Web 2.0. It is the platform that best illustrates the technical possibilities, the collaborative dimensions, and the avant-garde character of Web 2.0.
- 6 With its users banned from posting advertisements – a rule that recalls the practices of amateur photography clubs<sup>14</sup> – not to mention the respect of the community’s members for the intellectual property,<sup>15</sup> Flickr did much to reinforce the emerging myth of the virtuous, disinterested, and productive amateur. A number of platforms sought to replicate this model for video. Created in February 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, YouTube borrowed a number of features from Flickr: subscription is free; the display quality of the videos is high; uploading is easy; upload limits are generous;<sup>16</sup> content may be posted directly to the site without prior approval; the site provides an interface with comments, favorites, tags, and groups; and videos can easily be exported to a blog or external website.
- 7 In 2005, investment in the new media industry resumed after having been traumatized when, in 2001, the dotcom bubble burst. The renewed growth was driven by the

applications of Web 2.0. Between 2005 and 2006, sites such as MySpace, Wikipedia, YouTube, and Flickr saw their visitor numbers rise dramatically, while those of commercial sites remained stagnant.<sup>17</sup> Audience measurement companies and specialists in the field agreed that a turning point was at hand. Popularized by the Web 2.0 Conference in October 2005, an expression was coined to describe this phenomenon: ‘user-generated content,’ or UGC.<sup>18</sup> It was analyzed in detail in a report by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). The report found that users post content online for reasons of personal expression or to gain recognition, but without expectation of financial remuneration. Nevertheless, in posting images, a new form of value is engendered, as substantiated by audience numbers. According to the report, this shift in audience attention is taking place at the expense of traditional media. To address this imbalance, the organization recommends exploring legal and industry-based solutions for incorporating UGC into the normal operation of the marketplace.<sup>19</sup>

- 8 Behind the graphs and statistics lies considerable perplexity created by user-generated content. Unable to comprehend what was driving the success of the new applications, economists attempted to apply the practices of self-distribution to an industrial model; the result was a schema in which voluntary, unpaid production could be seen as entering into direct competition with the products on offer in the marketplace. But YouTube altered the terms of the debate. Instead of hosting primarily self-produced content, the platform came to be used as a vast archive, in which advertisements, music videos, TV shows, and copies of DVDs are recycled without regard for copyright.
- 9 It was the promise of UGC with its designation of the user as a ‘virtuous amateur’ that had prompted Google to purchase the site in October 2006 for the tidy sum of 1.65 billion dollars. Yet now, after a number of years have passed, it is clear this label was false.<sup>20</sup> The interpretation of the rapid rise of the collaborative platforms as a form of direct competition with the culture industry reflects the anxiety of the professionals vis-à-vis a phenomenon they did not understand.

## The Era of Buzz

- 10 Since 2005, the press and the culture industry, hostile to any expansion of the ‘free’ and the culture of sharing encouraged by the Internet, have increasingly sought to criminalize the users, accusing them of unfair trading practices that undermine the value of commercial production.<sup>21</sup> Published in 2007, Andrew Keen’s highly polemical *Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet Is Killing Our Culture* sounded the death knell for the myth of self-produced content.<sup>22</sup> The time had come for the market to take its revenge. When this work was translated into French, it included a preface by Denis Olivennes, chief executive officer of FNAC, author of *La Gratuité c’est le vol*,<sup>23</sup> and the primary inspiration behind the Hadopi anti file-sharing law, which was adopted in 2009. This paradigm shift was reinforced by a number of academic papers about Wikipedia and Flickr which showed that most of the contributions to these websites came from a small group of extremely active users. The figure of the virtuous amateur faded, to be replaced by a new interpretive framework based on audience share.
- 11 Invented for the mass media, the notion of audience share cannot easily be applied to the online world. After World War II, polling organizations for radio, and later for television, developed systems for evaluating audience exposure in an environment in which physical observation was impossible and broadcasts were financed by advertising. Audience

measurement appears to be a necessary artifact of this situation; its effectiveness is proportionate to the degree of consensus among the players involved, which is the fruit of a long process of socialization.<sup>24</sup> The Internet, as a medium of connection rather than distribution, of participation rather than display, and of niches and micro-communities rather than a mass medium, exhibited, from its inception, a number of characteristics incompatible with the fundamentals of audience measurement. Though the markets represented by these assessments are much coveted, one cannot help but be struck by the uncertainty that continues to surround the indicators used and the absence of any consensus regarding the validity of their methods.<sup>25</sup>

- 12 One of the paradoxes of the attempt to measure audience share on the Internet is that, unlike the traditional broadcast media, the device used to access the service produces a large amount of quantifiable information. But this so-called 'site-centric' data does not correspond to what is traditionally meant by audience share. Rather, it provides measurements of website traffic, and those measurements are heavily dependent on how the instrument is configured.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the results from two different systems measuring the number of page views or the number of visitors may diverge by as much as a factor of ten, simply because they use counting methods that take discrete approaches to the elimination of 'noise.' Website traffic is not the same thing as audience share. Nevertheless, the wide availability of these statistics and the often flattering picture they paint of the popularity of a website or resource have encouraged users to rely on them. This habit is not the least of the obstacles that stand in the way of establishing a thoughtful, balanced analysis of user behavior.
- 13 By offering free, group-oriented services, the Web 2.0 startups tend to apply the theory of the network effect, which states that the usefulness of a service is directly proportionate to the number of people who use it.<sup>27</sup> In order to implement this principle, Flickr and YouTube have elaborated a set of features designed to encourage exchange and interaction. The aim is not to store the images or videos but rather to turn them into focal points for conversation and navigation. Taken together, these features constitute a coherent system for 'socializing' the images. For example, both of these platforms have chosen to provide each individual photograph or video with its own separate view counter. Users had become familiar with these indicators thanks to the enormous popularity of blogs, but using them in connection with multimedia content was something new. From the collaborative perspective of the visual platforms, the resulting statistic was initially one among a number of parameters for evaluating user reaction to an online image. As Jean-Samuel Beuscart, Dominique Cardon, Nicolas Pissard, and Christophe Prieur point out in their study of Flickr, 'the site's designers set voluntary limits upon their creation of centralized calculators and other tools that foreground popularity.'<sup>28</sup>
- 14 In the case of YouTube, however, the data furnished by the view counters is incorporated into the algorithm used by the search engine. This apparently minor distinction has far reaching consequences. As soon as the counter increases the ranking of an item in the search results, this indicator, because it makes no distinction between registered members of the site and casual visitors, incorporates the behavior of external consumers into the body of information provided by the platform. The fact that it accords such importance to website traffic is one of the factors in YouTube's migration from the world of the participatory web to that of the mass media.

- 15 The online press has played a central role in this development. Between 2006 and 2008, in an environment marked by a heightened interest in the new ways in which images were being used on the Internet,<sup>29</sup> the websites of the large daily newspapers were the most powerful vehicles for creating awareness of and interest in online videos. In France, LeMonde.fr was the first of these sites to use content embedding to incorporate videos directly into the text of its articles.<sup>30</sup> Because of the high traffic at these sites, the embedded videos saw their audience figures increase substantially. When the media began drawing attention to the data provided by the counters, this attention contributed to the virality of the content and served to amplify the phenomenon even further.
- 16 The interpretation of these figures has been the result of a gradual process of refinement. In the context of the 2007 French presidential campaign, several newspapers raised questions regarding the high counts received by the videos of the Communist Party on the Dailymotion website, attributing them to the use of bots.<sup>31</sup> This fanciful interpretation was the first, still clumsy, expression of an interest in the reliability of the view of counters as indicators of audience share. The episode highlights the difficulty of establishing a reliable system of reference, without which any analysis is impossible.
- 17 A milestone was passed with the broadcast on the Internet of 'Sarkozy au G8' ('Sarkozy at the G8'),<sup>32</sup> which combined a press conference given by the French president with sarcastic commentary from an RTBF reporter. Posted on YouTube on June 8, 2007, this video was viewed fifteen million times in ten days, at this time the highest number of views in a short space of time that any piece of online content had ever received. Commenting on this figure, Guilhem Fouetillou compared it to the audience numbers for television evening news programs and the World Cup Final in 1998 (twenty million TV viewers).<sup>33</sup> Although hit count and audience share do not measure the same thing, it is clearly the analogy with television audiences that nonetheless shapes the perception of online video.
- 18 Underlying this comparison is the competition between old and new media, and the Messianic hope that the new will prevail. Yet, the power of our set ways of thinking is such that it gives rise to the paradox where the reach of Internet performances can only be understood when measured against previous scales. This, of course, makes the Internet appear as a mere counterpoint to the culture industry, and the oldest tool for the construction of the mass media becomes the primary key for reading online practices. Once this sort of reading is in place, its effectiveness is formidable: all one need do when talking about the new uses of the Web is to mention 'the video that created a buzz.'
- 19 The misunderstanding could not be more complete. The term 'buzz' originally comes from the marketing world, where it is used to describe the process by which news of some phenomenon spreads rapidly by non-institutional means such as word of mouth. It has gone on to become a specialized term for viral phenomena on the Internet. But virality is not popularity. The spontaneous spread of interest in a phenomenon was regarded by marketing professionals as evidence that it was particularly relevant or original. By reducing buzz to traffic, as the view counters allow them to do, observers of the Web turn their back on the specific ways in which the medium is actually used.
- 20 It is this distortion that underlies the tsunami called 'Susan Boyle'. On April 11, 2009, shortly after the start of ITV's new season of *Britain's Got Talent*, the network created an official account on YouTube, where it posted a number of clips from the show, including a carefully edited version of the appearance by the forty-seven year old Scottish native,

who took the audience by surprise with her performance of 'I Dreamed a Dream.' Word of the video spread on the social networking sites, and the segment was viewed more than twenty million times in less than a week and was widely discussed on blogs and in the online press.<sup>34</sup> At this point, reports of the new ratings sensation entered the phase of self-fulfilling prophecy, and the various versions of the video totaled some two-hundred million hits in just one month.

- 21 With the Susan Boyle episode, YouTube demonstrated its capacity to exercise the prerogatives of a mass medium by helping to create a meta-narrative on a global scale. Yet this achievement does not mark the victory of the moderns over the ancients. On the contrary, it is proof that there exists a highly developed level of interaction between Web 2.0 and the culture industry. The appearance of the first advertising campaigns to blend conventional platforms with viral versions points to the complementary nature of the tools.<sup>35</sup> On June 5, 2009, Yann Arthus-Bertrand's environmental documentary *Home* was the first work to be distributed simultaneously on all available platforms, from television to YouTube as well as movie theaters and DVD, confirmation that the collaborative website has now become a full-fledged member of the media chorus.<sup>36</sup>

## A Pragmatics of the Archive

- 22 The era of buzz has refuted the beliefs that defined the era of the amateurs. But the tyranny of audience share is no more destined to represent the be-all and end-all of the visual platforms than is the return of the 'hit parade' (whose demise was predicted by Chris Anderson in *The Long Tail*<sup>37</sup>), since these platforms behave as *both* mass *and* participatory media. The primary lesson to be drawn from their still brief history is that there is a discrepancy between discourses and practices. As Walter Benjamin had written about photography, instead of rambling on about the contest between the old media and the new, we should instead be wondering whether the Internet is not, in fact, transforming the very nature of our relationship with the media.<sup>38</sup>
- 23 Beyond self-fulfilling 'ratings sensations' and simplistic interpretive schemas, the actual uses of the Internet have taken shape quietly, with very little fanfare. The behavior of those who post online content has been the subject of detailed analysis. Active involvement in content sharing essentially takes the form of a social game.<sup>39</sup> If need be, these tools can also be used temporarily as distribution channels for pieces of self-produced content on the model of the parasitic image.<sup>40</sup> The behavior of those who consume shared content has not been studied as extensively. The practice of spreading word of or recommending online content also involves new behaviors, in which images function as a kind of currency or social bond.
- 24 But the most widespread use of these platforms is as encyclopedic reference sources or archives. Along with the search engines and social networking sites, the two sites that most define how the Internet is used today are YouTube and Wikipedia, thanks to their usefulness as reference works. Spontaneously supplied with its content by its users and in accordance with their own personal interests, YouTube today contains not only the latest hit songs, movie trailers, and ads, but also home movies, recipes, solutions to Rubik's Cube, newscasts and entertainment shows, as well as a comprehensive archive of early cinema, TV shows from the 1960s, scientific lectures, political films, and documentaries. Just as Wikipedia represents the active construction of our knowledge, so YouTube constitutes the largest repository of living visual culture. Though both sites have similar



limitations and similar risks, they both have the power that comes from pooling all shareable resources on a single website.<sup>41</sup>

- 25 Unlike Wikipedia, whose content is furnished by the users themselves, YouTube's richness lies in its vocation as a vehicle for the dissemination of an already existing archive. Theoretically, this practice is restricted by the constraints of intellectual property law. But these constraints are widely circumvented or contravened. YouTube responds to complaints from copyright holders by removing the content in question after the fact; in this way, the platform is essentially rewriting the rules of copyright in its own way. The pattern that emerges is that of a certain kind of distribution right: as long as the copyright holder does not intervene, chances are good that the content will be allowed to remain on the site. Some authors choose to permit or even encourage the unauthorized distribution of their work. This is the case, for example, with Daft Punk, a French band whose songs are among the most heavily copied, remixed, and pirated content on the Internet. The ephemeral character of online postings constitutes another way of getting around copyright law. If a piece of content that has been withdrawn from the website is later reposted by another subscriber, it remains accessible at the level of the platform via the search engine. Finally, even videos that do disappear from the website have usually been online for a few days before being removed; thus they had been able, if only briefly, to reach an audience. The floating character of the content's availability in no way prevents the archive from being used. Finally, the increasingly active involvement of the major distributors, who are becoming producers of free content in their own right, is gradually normalizing a situation that ultimately profits everyone.
- 26 Since the birth of the World Wide Web, there have been many pioneers who have aspired to create a new Library of Alexandria that would bring all the world's knowledge together in a single place. This utopia has run up against numerous obstacles – physical, legal, as well as economic. With the rise of YouTube, however, the users themselves have set about creating a visual archive unlike one ever dreamed of before – except perhaps by Bill Gates. Although more modest in its scope, the use of Flickr as an encyclopedia or documentary archive has also become a reality, as demonstrated by various forms of reuse and content exporting.<sup>42</sup>
- 27 With the advent of digital technologies, just as with the invention of photography, it was feared that the value of images would be undermined. These fears were unfounded. For, as we can see now, the dynamism of visual platforms is derived from the collectivization of contents, which makes the image into common property and thus alters its basic uses. The true value of an image today is its shareability; the collaborative creation of the most important visual archive is a direct consequence of the new status of the image, as well as one of the most concrete results of the uses of Web 2.0.



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## NOTES

1. See Estelle BLASCHKE, 'From the Picture Archive to the Image Bank: Commercializing the Visual through Photography. The Bettmann Archive and Corbis,' *Études photographiques* 24 (November 2009): 171–181.
2. Paul VALÉRY, 'The Conquest of Ubiquity,' in *Aesthetics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 226.
3. A platform is a specialized interactive service on the World Wide Web. I use the term 'visual platform' to refer to a website devoted to the online management of still or moving images.
4. I have borrowed the term 'image economy' from Matthias BRUHN; see Matthias BRUHN, *Bildwirtschaft: Verwaltung und Verwertung der Sichtbarkeit* (Weimar: VDG Verlag, 2003).
5. Among the most important early entrants in this field were the websites iFilm (for storing videos, created in 1997) and Ofoto (for storing photographs, created in 1999).
6. Chief among these are Smugmug (2002), Photobucket (2003), and ImageShack (2003) for photographs; and Metacafe (2002) and Vimeo (2004) for videos. It is worth pointing out that on the Internet, the quantity of restricted images far outweighs that of free access content. According to an estimate published by comScore in April 2009, the leading image hosting service is ImageShack, with twenty billion uploaded photographs, followed by Facebook, with fifteen billion. Flickr at this time had 'only' 3.5 billion uploaded images.
7. See Tim O'REILLY, 'What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software,' O'Reilly.com: September 23, 2005 (<http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>).
8. Dan GILLMOR, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* (Sebastopol: O'Reilly, 2004). See also Charles LEADBEATER and Paul MILLER, *The Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Economy and Society* (London: Demos, 2004), available online at <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/proameconomy/>.
9. See Lawrence LESSIG, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004), available online at <http://free-culture.cc>.
10. See Chris ANDERSON, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More* (New York: Hyperion, 2006).
11. PIOTRR [Pierre MOUNIER], 'La révolution des amateurs-professionnels,' *Homo numericus*: February 26, 2005 ([http://blog.homo-numericus.net/article.php3?id\\_article=12](http://blog.homo-numericus.net/article.php3?id_article=12)).
12. Until 2006, users with free accounts were allowed to post an unlimited number of images to the website (that number was then limited to 200); they were, however, restricted in their monthly upload limit (twenty megabytes as opposed to two gigabytes for those with pro accounts). According to the study by Jean-Samuel BEUSCART, Dominique CARDON, et al., in July 2006, 96.3 percent of registered users had free accounts (see Jean-Samuel BEUSCART, Dominique CARDON, Nicolas PISSARD, and Christophe PRIEUR, 'Pourquoi partager mes photos de vacances avec des inconnus? Les usages de Flickr,' *Réseaux*, no. 154 (2009): 99, available online at [Cairn.info](http:// Cairn.info)).
13. First proposed by Lawrence LESSIG (see note 9) in 2001, Creative Commons licenses seek to relax the restrictions of copyright by contractually defining an optional series of rights to use material free of charge.
14. See A.M. COX, P.D. CLOUGH, and J. MARLOW, 'Flickr: A First Look at User Behaviour in the Context of Photography as Serious Leisure,' *Information Research* 13/1 (March 2008), available online at <http://informationr.net/ir/13-1/paper336.html>.

15. Whereas most of the content on YouTube is copied from culture industry productions, Flickr has remained relatively unaffected by the pirating of copyrighted photographs or the stealing of one subscriber's images by another. This is likely due to the fact that photographs are easier to produce than videos, as well as to the website's strong community spirit.
16. YouTube initially imposed an upload limit of one hundred megabytes per video. By comparison, at that time a platform like Vimeo allowed its users to upload only twenty megabytes per week.
17. See Richard MCMANUS, 'R/WW Trend Watch: User-Generated Sites Define This Era of the Web,' ReadWriteWeb.com: November 26, 2006 ([http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/user-generated\\_sites\\_define\\_this\\_era\\_of\\_web.php](http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/user-generated_sites_define_this_era_of_web.php)). See also Sarah LACY, *The Stories of Facebook, YouTube and MySpace: The People, the Hype and the Deals Behind the Giants of Web 2.0* (Richmond: Crimson Publishing, 2008).
18. See Richard MCMANUS, 'Web 2.0 Conference Day 2: Yahoo! CEO on Future of Media,' ZDNet.com: October 6, 2005 (<http://blogs.zdnet.com/web2explorer/?p=26>).
19. See Sacha WUNSCH-VINCENT and Graham PICKERY, *Participative Web: User-Created Content* (December 2006), report by OECD, Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry, ref. DSTI/ICCP/IE(2006)7, April 2007, 74 pp., available online at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/14/38393115.pdf>.
20. Nate Anderson, 'Did "Lazy Sunday" Make YouTube's \$1.5 Billion Sale Possible?,' *Ars Technica*: November 23, 2008 (<http://arstechnica.com/old/content/2008/11/did-lazy-sunday-make-youtubes-1-5-billion-sale-possible.ars>).
21. See André GUNTHER, 'Tous journalistes? Les attentats de Londres ou l'intrusion des amateurs,' in *La photo de presse: usages et pratiques*, ed. Gianni HAVER (Lausanne: Éditions Antipodes, 2009), available online at <http://www.arhv.lhivic.org/index.php/2009/03/19/956-tous-journalistes>.
22. Andrew KEEN, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).
23. Denis OLIVENNES, *La gratuité, c'est le vol. Quand le piratage tue la culture* (Paris: Grasset, 2007).
24. See Emmanuel FRAISSE, 'Que mesure-t-on quand on mesure l'audience?,' *Hermès*, no. 37 (2003): 51–62, available online at <http://documents.irevues.inist.fr/handle/2042/9385>; Régine CHANCIAC, 'Télévision: l'adoption laborieuse d'une référence unique,' *Hermès*, no. 37 (2003): 81–93, available online at <http://documents.irevues.inist.fr/handle/2042/9388>.
25. See Josiane JOUET, 'La pêche aux internautes,' *Hermès*, no. 37 (2003): 203–11, available online at <http://documents.irevues.inist.fr/handle/2042/9403>; Alain Le DIBERDER, 'La mesure d'audience des nouveaux médias: une bonne réponse mais quelle est la question?,' *Hermès*, no. 37 (2003): 221–28, available online at <http://documents.irevues.inist.fr/handle/2042/9405>.
26. See Raphaëlle KARAYAN, 'Mesure d'audience Internet: comment s'y retrouver?,' *Le Journal du Net*: April 14, 2006 (<http://www.journaldunet.com/0604/060414-mesureaudience.shtml>).
27. See Carl SHAPIRO and Hal R. VARIAN, *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 1999); see also Olivier BOMSEL, *Gratuit! Du déploiement de l'économie numérique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).
28. Jean-Samuel BEUSCART, Dominique CARDON, et al., 'Pourquoi partager mes photos de vacances avec des inconnus?' (note 12), 126.
29. See André GUNTHER, 'Emballlements médiatiques autour des nouveaux usages de l'image,' *Actualités de la recherche en histoire visuelle*: April 30, 2006 (<http://www.arhv.lhivic.org/index.php/2006/04/30/163>).
30. See André GUNTHER, 'La vidéo d'Angers: un tournant de la culture médiatique française,' *Actualités de la recherche en histoire visuelle*: November 19, 2006 (<http://www.arhv.lhivic.org/index.php/2006/11/19/247>).

31. See Damien LELOUP and Alexandre PIQUARD, 'Audiences surprenantes de vidéos communistes sur Dailymotion,' *Le Monde.fr*: January 28, 2007 (<http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-823448,36-859874,0.html>).
32. THLLLL [Thomas LESUI], 'Sarkozy au G8,' video, 50 secs., YouTube: June 8, 2007 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4u3449L5VI>).
33. Guilhem FOUETILLOU, 'Vidéo de Sarkozy au G8, un impact sous-évalué,' *Observatoire présidentielle* 2007: June 13, 2007 (<http://blog.observatoire-presidentielle.fr/index.php?2007/06/13/78-video-de-sarkozy-au-g8-un-impact-sous-evalue>).
34. See Fatima AZIZ, 'L'image en contexte. Le phénomène Susan Boyle,' *SocioVeille*: April 28, 2009 (<http://bit.ly/hZeqK>).
35. See Rémi DOUINE, 'Economie de la viralité' (lecture at the 4<sup>th</sup> École doctorale d'été EHESS/ Institut Telecom, 'Pratiques des images dans la société de l'information', September 10, 2009, Porquerolles)
36. *Home*, dir. Yann ARTHUS-BERTRAND, Europacorp prod., 1:40, available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNGDj9IeAuI>.
37. See Chris ANDERSON, *The Long Tail* (note 10), ch. 2.
38. 'Commentators had earlier expended much fruitless ingenuity on the question of whether photography was an art – without asking the more fundamental question of whether the invention of photography had not transformed the entire character of art.' (italics in original). Walter BENJAMIN, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' (2nd ed.), trans. Edmund JEPHCOTT and Harry ZOHAN, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3., ed. Howard EILAND and Michael W. JENNINGS (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 109.
39. See Jean-Samuel BEUSCART, Dominique CARDON, et al., 'Pourquoi partager mes photos de vacances avec des inconnus?' (note 12), 96–97.
40. See ANDRÉ GUNTHER, 'L'image parasite. Après le journalisme citoyen,' *Études photographiques*, no. 20 (June 2007): 174–86, available online at <http://etudesphotographiques.revues.org/index996.html>.
41. See Hubert GUILLAUD, 'Quand YouTube remplacera Google,' *InternetActu.net*: December 11, 2008 (<http://www.internetactu.net/2008/12/11/quand-youtube-remplacera-google/>).
42. See Amélie SEGONDS, 'Vers un déplacement de la sphère documentaire,' *Indexation visuelle et recherche d'images sur le Web: enjeux et problèmes* (master's thesis, EHESS, 2009), 92–107.

## ABSTRACTS

Even more than their digital production, it is the dissemination of photographs and videos using the applications of 'Web 2.0' that has brought about a fundamental transformation in our relationship with images. This article analyzes the transition from an economy of controlled distribution to a situation of self-managed abundance and describes the two phases by which the history of the emergence of the visual platforms has been marked. After an initial period dominated by an emphasis on the 'revolution of the amateurs,' the perception of content sharing became focused on the measurement of audience share. Governed as they are by the notion of a contest between the old media and the new, both of these models offer only highly incomplete descriptions of the mechanisms at work, which are actually based on a logic of complementarity and interaction. An examination of the ways in which these platforms are actually used – for

example, as encyclopedias – suggests that the socialization of visual content has brought about a change in the status of images: they are now common property. Today, the value of images lies in the ability to share them.

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